
NEWS RELEASE

Judd Gregg

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GREGG COMMENTS ON ADMINISTRATION'S SMALLPOX VACCINE ANNOUNCEMENT

WASHINGTON— U.S. Senator Judd Gregg, incoming Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, today issued the following statement in reaction to President George W. Bush's announcement regarding the new smallpox vaccine plan.

Senator Gregg commented, "As a strong advocate for making the smallpox vaccine available to the general public with medical supervision, I applaud the Administration's proposal and was pleased by today's important announcement. The President made the right decision in going forward with a voluntary smallpox vaccination program that would start with approximately 500,000 health care workers, expand to 10 million emergency responders and then extend to the rest of the population as early as 2004.

"In a system that values personal liberty and freedom, I strongly believe that Americans, after consulting with their doctors, should be allowed to make voluntary, informed decisions for themselves and their families as to whether they want to receive the smallpox vaccination as a precautionary measure against any future attack using the smallpox disease as a weapon.

"Absent a pre-attack, voluntary smallpox vaccination program, an outbreak would require the vaccination of millions of U.S. residents within 10 days. Such a plan may not be feasible, particularly in a situation where there are simultaneous attacks in multiple cities. In the mass panic and confusion that would surely follow such an attack, the ability of the Centers for Disease Control and local health agencies would likely be overwhelmed.

"While the smallpox vaccine can have very serious and occasionally fatal side-effects for a small number of persons, giving Americans the opportunity to receive the vaccine would actually reduce the likelihood of such complications. Citizens in a non-crisis environment would have time to meet with their physician, go over their medical history and that of their family, weigh the potential risks and benefits and make a thoughtful personal decision. In an attack, screening would likely be made very quickly by an unfamiliar doctor in an anonymous, crisis-mode setting.

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“The more people who are vaccinated against smallpox, the lower the rate of transmission of the disease, and the greater the likelihood that such an outbreak could be contained. Moreover, the fewer people who are susceptible to the disease, the less likely an enemy is to use it against us. We must be prepared for future attacks by individuals and organizations who want to kill Americans, and giving people the ability to make informed choices like this, is one component of our defense against terrorism.”

Earlier this year, Senator Gregg introduced a bill issuing a Sense of the Senate that the smallpox vaccine should be made available to every person throughout the country. The proposal was first introduced in September as an amendment to the homeland security bill, but was not included in the final package.

Although the Administration does not recommend the vaccine to the general public, it will make the vaccine available to persons in the general public over age 18 who choose to participate in an ongoing clinical trial or investigational new drug application.

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